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FACTS CONCERNING THE ALCOHOL TRAFFIC IN AFRICA

By
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RECENT FACTS CONCERNING THE ALCOHOL TRAFFIC IN AFRICA.

EUROPEAN contact with the Native Races is creating some of the most difficult problems with which the world is confronted. All too little attention is being paid to the quick march of events that is taking place in the various native territories and the direction to which such events portend.

It was the failure to realise this fact that had been responsible for much of the trouble in the past. Innumerable wars, expeditions and risings that have been waged in Africa and elsewhere might have been averted had the cause or causes of such rising been understood. Such is the Liquor Traffic among the Native Races. It is not too much to say that the map of Africa and of the world as far as the Native Races are concerned would have been very different had it not been for the Liquor Traffic, and many of the problems with which we are faced to-day are the direct result of our failure rightly to diagnose the situation in the past or to deal with it before it had assumed such enormous proportions. Unless we are now prepared to accept, and courageously take up our responsibilities to the Native Races in the spirit of true trusteeship, we shall have to face them again under other and more difficult circumstances.

Africa is the largest of the five Continents. One-fourth of the earth's land surface is confined within the continent. It is three times the size of Europe and four times the size of the United States. It is as far round the African Coast as it is round the world. Every eighth person of the world's population lives in what has been termed " the dark continent." The eyes of the world have during recent years been directed towards this land.

Africa possessed an early civilisation which had reached a high standard, long centuries before the foremost nations of the Europe of to-day were born, and who shall say that after her centuries of travail are past, she shall not yet come forth again to take her place among the nations as a centre of light and power, and with added lustre ? Her monuments still stand, and the statue of the great sphinx facing the sunrise at her Northern gateway speaks in metaphor of the dawn of a day that has been long in coming but surely cannot now be far distant. Africa, " a slave pen, a battle-field for ages, robbed of her children, coveted by the nations, poisoned by spirits, patiently waits her time of deliverance." In the meantime we are allowing the Native Races to go over to Mahomedanism and get the protection of that religion, from the drink curse of a Christian

civilisation, for want of moral courage to suppress the traffic. What is needed at the present moment, is the vision of the prophet, the penetrating insight of the seer, the spirit of the missionary, a Christianised commerce, and a firm and righteous legislation to write it into actuality.

For our present purpose Africa may be divided into three divisions :

Northern : Equatorial ; Southern.

Northern.

1. The *Northern* division is represented by Algiers, Tunis, Morocco, Lybia and Egypt. In it the liquor traffic is for the most part contrary to the religion of the inhabitants. Nevertheless, it is being increasingly introduced by the Europeans, traders, and others, and liquor for the populations of this area is finding a definite place in the imports for this territory.

Equatorial.

2. *Equatorial.* In this division the greater part of African territory is registered, and in it by far the greater portion of its population is to be found. Apart from the many pagan races—Negro and Bantu—every other race resident on the continent is to be found within its borders. It has suffered invasion from every side. The traffic in human merchandise largely centred in this territory. Northward across the desert wastes, and along the caravan routes, unnumbered thousands of slaves were transported to the Mediterranean ports for distribution to various centres and from the creeks and ports of the Eastern and Western seaboards, millions of Africa's sons and daughters, sold into slavery, were shipped to lands far distant. The arms traffic, and the liquor traffic, were the chief agencies by which the prosecution of the slave traffic was furthered. This trinity of evils—the slave traffic, the arms traffic, and the liquor traffic—for which Christian nations were responsible, has left an indelible impress upon the continent and forms one of the blackest pages in African history. It is, however, to the credit of Britain that she took the lead in abolishing the slave traffic, and it remains for her, in association with the other Powers, to abolish the liquor traffic, for by it very largely the riches of Africa have been secured.

Southern.

3. *Southern Africa.* In the Southern portion of the African continent liquor for the most part is prohibited to the natives, the one great exception being in the Union of South Africa, where in the Cape Province the liquor traffic has wrought such havoc, and where to-day it is much in evidence and operating with disastrous results among the coloured and other sections of the community.

In the three other Provinces of the Union, namely, The Transvaal, Free State, and Natal, the liquor traffic to natives is by

law prohibited. Liquor is free to Europeans; brandy is very cheap; with the result that on the Gold Fields in the Transvaal where over 100,000 natives are employed, an organised system of illicit supply of liquor to the natives is carried on by a class of "white man" who is responsible for filling the gaols with natives, but rarely gets brought to book himself. Several attempts have been made to deal with the situation, but thus far to little effect. The position has long since become a scandal and calls for the application of the only remedy that can meet the case, namely, total prohibition. This is the question with which the Union is being faced.

As this paper will largely deal with Western Equatorial Africa (the most thickly populated part) a brief survey of the periods during which it has been opened up by European agencies may assist to a better understanding of the situation.

The FIRST period may be reckoned as that during which the coast-belt, or that part of West Africa which was accessible to trade, was being practically inundated by liquor, without any control, trade spirits being without a rival as an article of barter and supplying the chief currency of the coast.

The SECOND period may be described as the awakening time when the evils of this traffic were brought to the notice of the British people by missionaries, explorers, travellers, and others, and as a result there was brought into being the United Committee for the Prevention of the Demoralisation of the Native Races by the Liquor Traffic. It was in part due to the efforts of this Committee that the British Government were instrumental in bringing to the notice of European and other Powers the facts respecting the evils of this traffic, and in securing international action through the Brussels General Act. Under this Act it was agreed by the Powers to prohibit the Liquor Traffic where it had not penetrated, and by this means large areas of Central Africa, including Northern Nigeria, the larger part of the Congo territory, and most of East Africa, were declared by the Powers concerned as areas of Prohibition. Unfortunately this measure only applied to natives of the particular area, and an extensive system of permits greatly diminished its value.

The THIRD period includes the years during which successive Conferences were held in connection with the provisions of the Brussels General Act, and marks the extension of the Prohibition areas by the various Governments, also the fixing of higher duties on all importations of spirits. These Conferences and the Bureau which was established at Brussels have kept the liquor question prominently before the Governments of the Great Powers.

The FOURTH period may be mentioned as the War era, during which the stoppage of the Continental spirit traffic and the difficulty

of transport from other countries caused a practical cessation of the importation of trade spirits. This created a situation most favourable to reform. It was in the latter part of this period that the British Colonial Secretary announced that it would be his duty to advise the representatives of the British Government at the Peace Conference to press on their own initiative for the abolition of the Liquor Traffic in West Africa, and that we ought to put an end to it, for it certainly had been conducive to great evil and great misfortune. To get the various Powers having possessions in Africa to agree to a uniform policy of Prohibition was of the greatest importance, and one to which strenuous efforts were put forth by the British Committee previously mentioned, and the Fédération Internationale to secure its accomplishment. This policy was greatly furthered in influential circles in France and received strong support in communications with the Belgian, Portuguese, and Liberian authorities, and the new situation was placed before the various representatives of the Peace Conference in Paris, and to which Conference a petition was later addressed.

During the interim, while the question of total Prohibition was under consideration, forces were at work in British and other commercial circles interested in the trade to secure a continuance of the traffic. Such pressure was brought to bear that what might have been one of the greatest triumphs of British statesmanship was thwarted and allowed to be sacrificed to the selfish aims and interests of a few. This lost opportunity in West Africa can only be recorded as a tragedy. This action was immediately reflected upon the International situation, and the traffic under a new set of circumstances entered upon a new lease.

The FIFTH period may be connected with the Peace Treaty which included two international declarations of great importance with reference to alcohol and the Native Races.

The first of these is to be found in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, which is concerned with what are known as " Mandated Areas." According to this Article it is laid down that the administration of these territories is based upon the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation. In furtherance of this principle " the prohibition of abuses such as the slave trade, the arms traffic and the liquor traffic " was agreed upon and embodied in the Covenant.

At the same time a new International Convention was concluded on September 10th, 1919, by seven of the Great Powers, in which they agreed upon a policy prohibiting the importation, distribution, sale and possession of " trade spirits " of every kind, and of beverages mixed with these spirits, within the greater part of the area previously defined in theBrussels General Act, as also absinthe and other spirits of a similar character. The Powers represented

were the United States of America, Belgium, the British Empire (including the Dominion of Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, the Union of South Africa, and India), France, Italy, Japan and Portugal.

Four salient features of the Convention should be carefully noted :

(1) That the areas of Prohibition to natives previously existing are to be maintained.

(2) That in other areas it is only " trade spirits " (however that term may be interpreted), which are to be prohibited.

(3) That all other classes of liquor, including brandy, whisky, gin, rum, etc., are free to all, native included, in territories where the sale of liquor is licensed and where it can be sold.

(4) That upon all importations higher duties have been imposed.

Much difficulty has arisen from the interpretation of these international agreements, and at the last meeting of the Fédération Internationale pour la Protection des Races Indigènes contre l'Alcoolisme, which took place in Lausanne in August, 1921, it was agreed to use every endeavour :

(*a*) to secure that the " Prohibition of the Liquor Traffic in mandated areas " should be carried out, and

(*b*) that in the area of the Convention the term " distilled liquors " should be substituted for " trade spirits."

At the time when these resolutions were passed, draft mandates for African territories had already been drawn up and it was noted with great regret that the term " Strict Control " had been substituted for " Prohibition."

As this is clearly out of harmony with the terms and the spirit of Article 22 of the Covenant, representations were made to the British Government as well as to the League of Nations.

Whilst the African " B " Mandates (which for some reason have been singled out for separate treatment) still contain this unfortunate alteration, it is worthy of note that the Council of the League of Nations in July, 1922, passed the following resolution :

> "The Council of the League of Nations conscious of the gravity of the danger for the native populations of Central Africa arising from the scourge of alcoholism, recommends that the Mandatory Powers should do everything in their power that their administrations should protect the populations from the above-mentioned danger."

These international decisions mark in certain respects a stage in the advance, but not to the extent which had been anticipated, for the Prohibition of the Liquor Traffic, previously referred to has

been reduced to the prohibition of " trade spirits." As the term " trade spirits " cannot satisfactorily be defined difficulties have arisen.

The fight in West Africa respecting the Liquor Traffic immediately took on a new form, it became one of trade marks, labels, countries of origin, maturity of spirits, prices, etc. These brought into being a new set of difficulties. After five years of attempts to define " trade spirits " a list is being drawn up of different classes and brands that may be imported, which, be it noted, can be added to if necessary. The question of Alcohol therefore still remains *unsolved.*

Space forbids my going further into this part of the subject ; suffice it to say that instead of Colonial administration being brought to the standard as laid down in the Covenant, the " B " Mandates, as far as the liquor traffic is concerned, have been made to conform to the lower practices of Colonial administration in the contiguous territories.

This then in brief is the position to which we have come.

Prior to the war it was freely stated by a section of those interested in West African trade :

(1) That the natives would not work without gin.

(2) That trade could not be conducted without spirits.

(3) That revenue could not be raised without liquor.

The value of these statements and many others of a similar character have been revealed during the war, and I now present a comparative statement of the results of Trade and Revenue in relation to the Spirit Traffic in the four British West African Colonies, for the seven-year period ending 1913 (pre-war year) against the seven years ending 1920, when liquor importations were restricted. I do so the more readily in view of the many utterances that are being made relative to the loss of trade and revenue that has followed the restricted importations of liquor in British West Africa.

British West Africa.

Table I. Trade. In the seven years ending pre-war year 1913, a period when the liquor traffic was unrestricted, the *Total Trade* in the four British Colonies of West Africa registered £147,126,714.

In the seven years ending 1920, a period when the liquor traffic was under restriction, the *Total Trade* registered £274,080,404.

TABLE I.

A.E.M.

BRITISH WEST AFRICA.

COMPARATIVE STATEMENT OF TOTAL TRADE

FOR THE 7 YEARS ENDING 1920

AGAINST THE 7 YEARS ENDING 1913

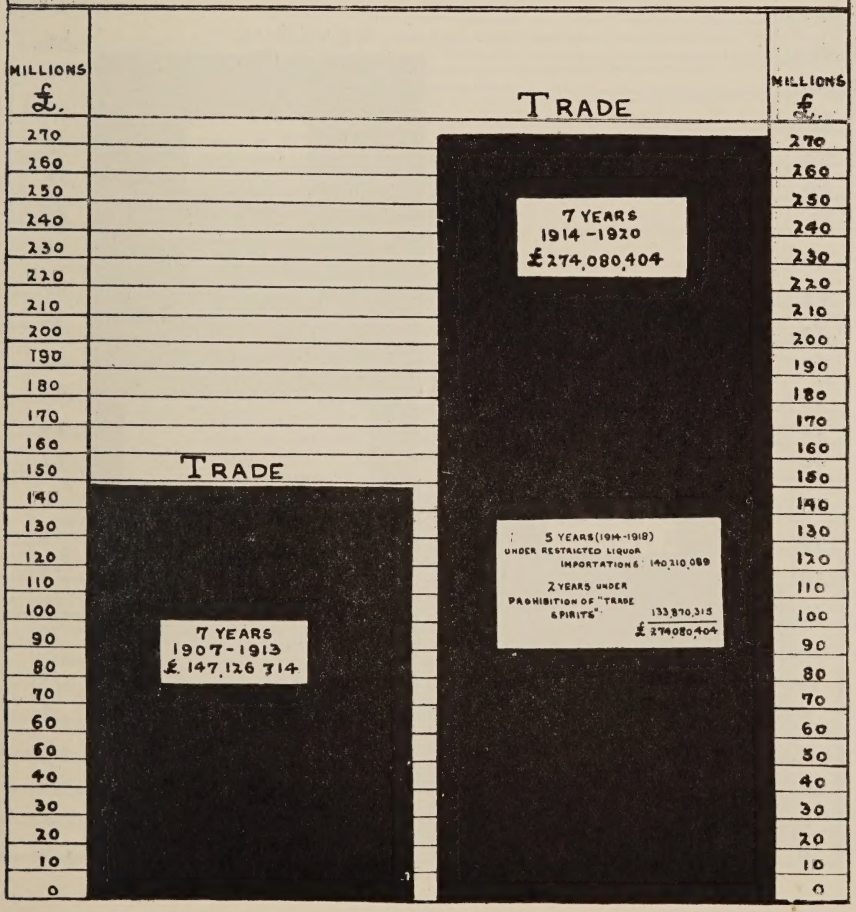


Table II. Revenue. In the seven years ending 1913, when the liquor traffic was unrestricted, the *Total Revenue* in British West Africa was £28,506,440.

In the seven years ending 1920, when the liquor traffic was under restriction, the *Total Revenue* registered £45,989,300.

TABLE II

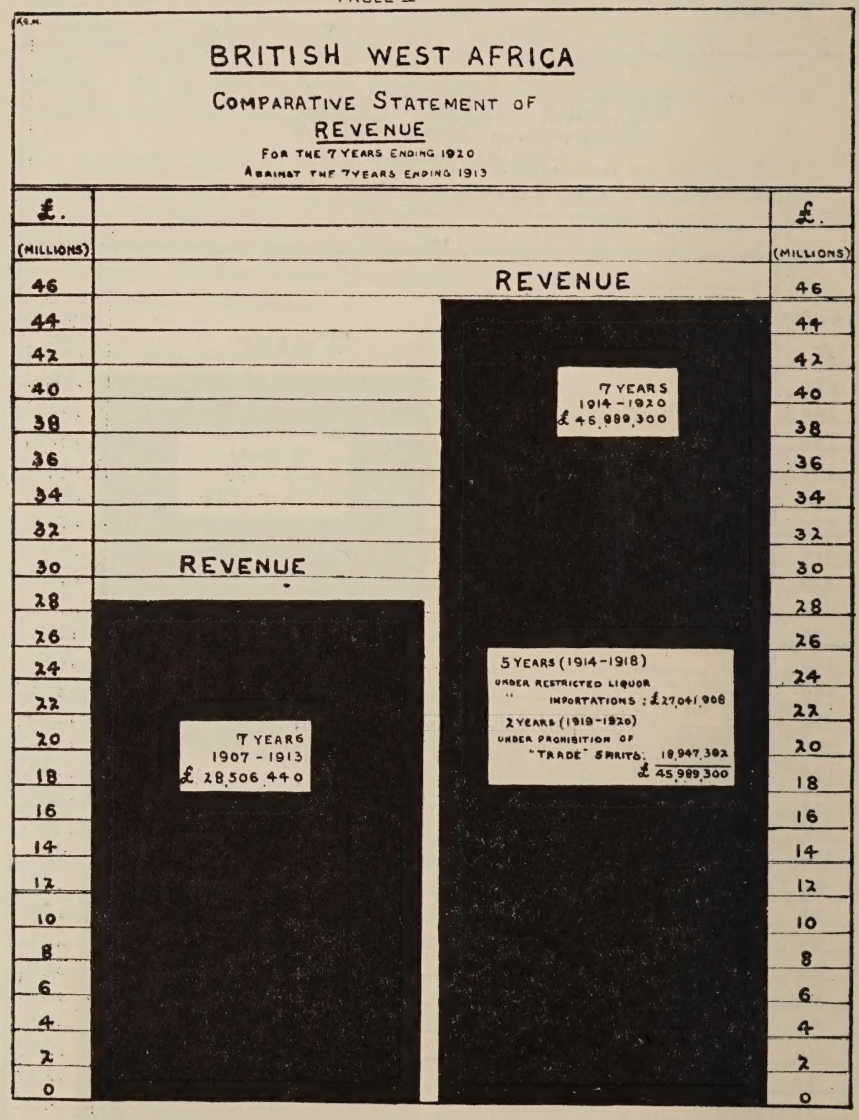
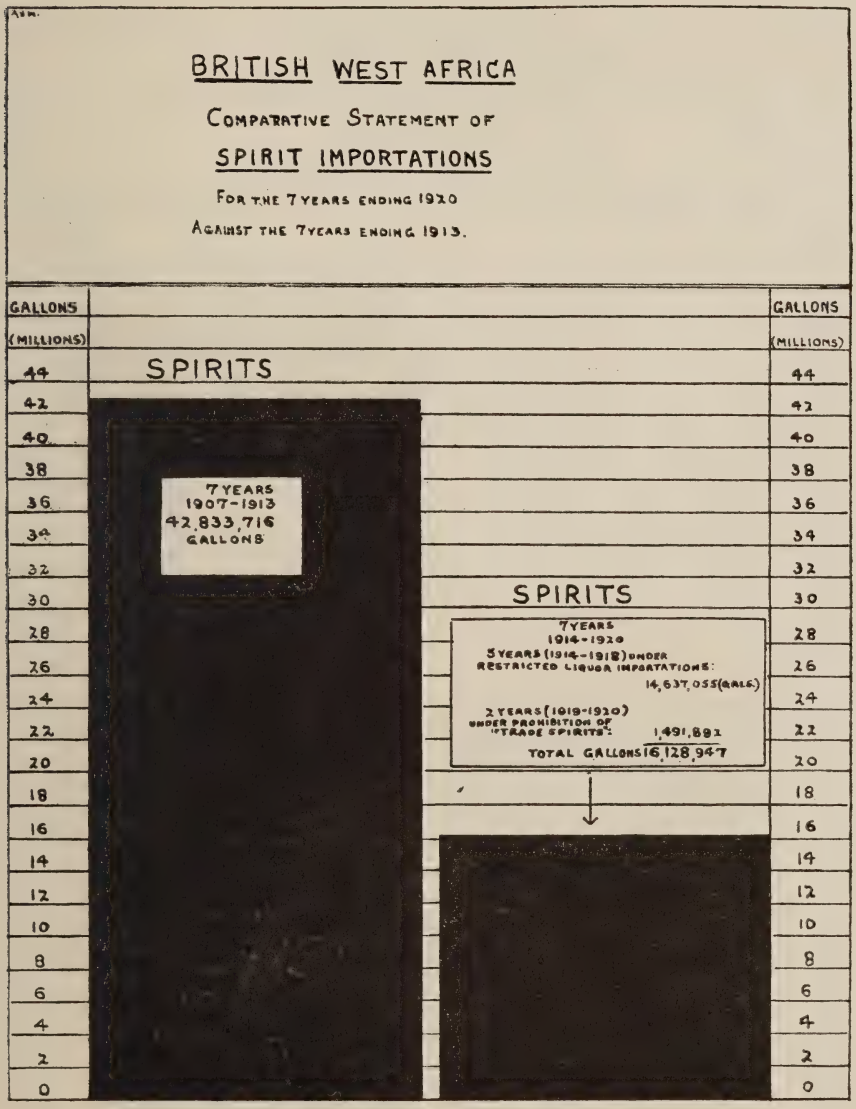


Table III. Spirit Importations. In the seven years ending 1913, the spirits imported in British West Africa totalled 42,833,716 gallons.

In the seven years ending 1920 the importations of spirits registered but 16,128,947 gallons.

TABLE III.



Tables IV. and IV.a. In the seven years ending 1913, a time of unrestricted sale of liquor, 42,833,716 gallons were imported. In this period the *Total Trade* registered £147,126,714.

In the seven years ending 1920, a time of restricted importation of liquor, 16,128,947 gallons were imported. In this period the *Trade* totalled £274,080,404.

TABLE IV.

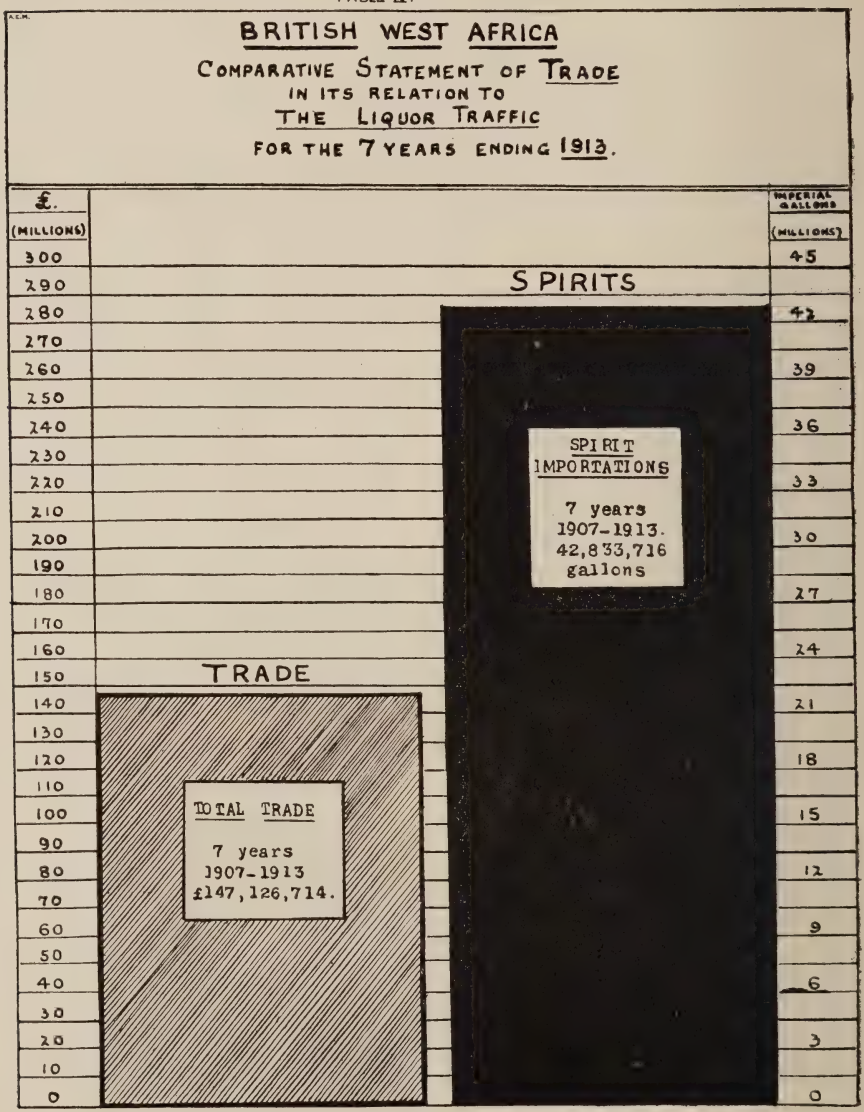


TABLE IVa.

A.E.M.

BRITISH WEST AFRICA

COMPARATIVE STATEMENT OF TRADE IN ITS RELATION TO THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC FOR THE 7 YEARS ENDING 1920

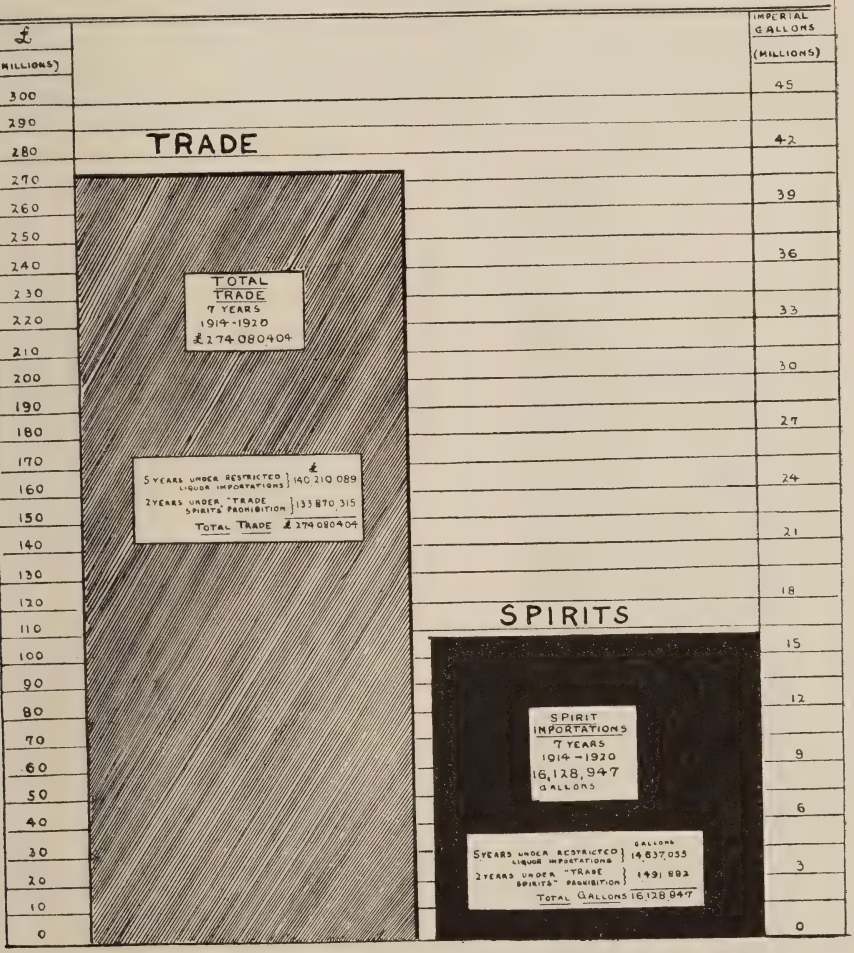
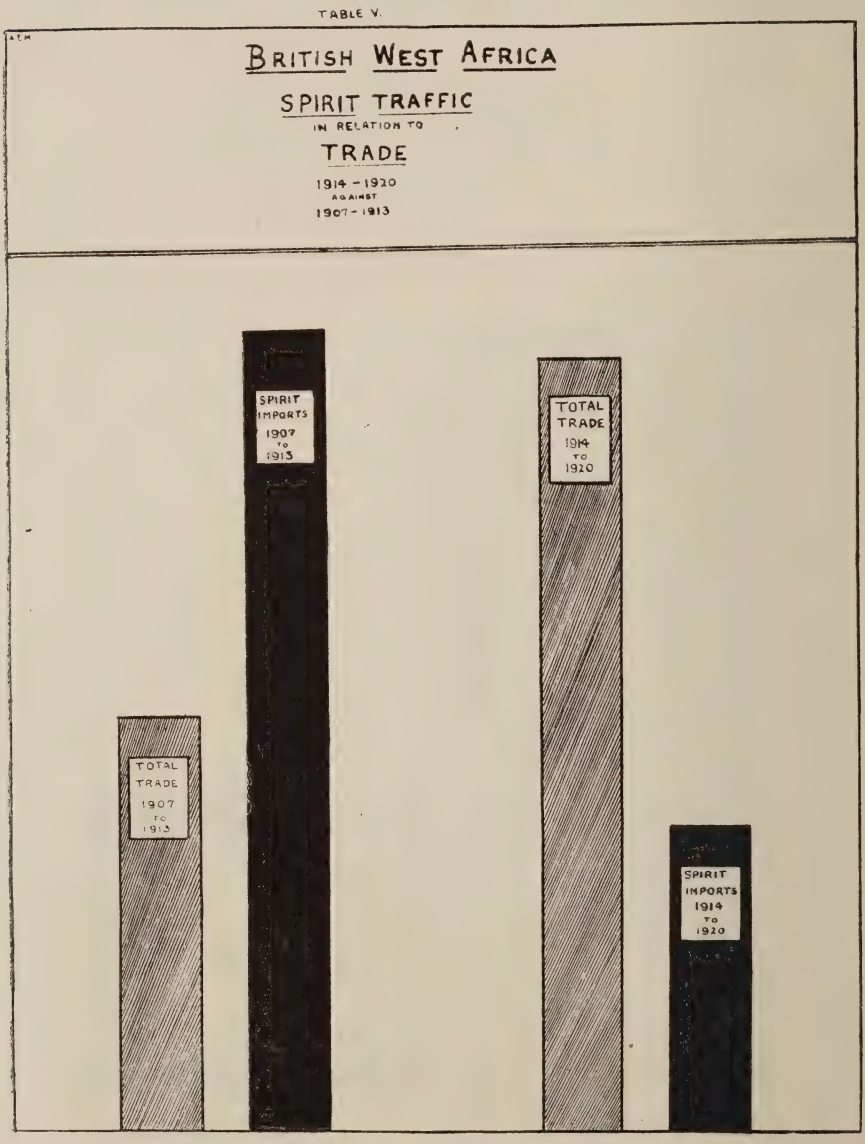


Table V. These five diagrams illustrate pictorially the *Spirit Traffic in Relation to Trade*, and give a bird's-eye view of the situation.



To summarise :

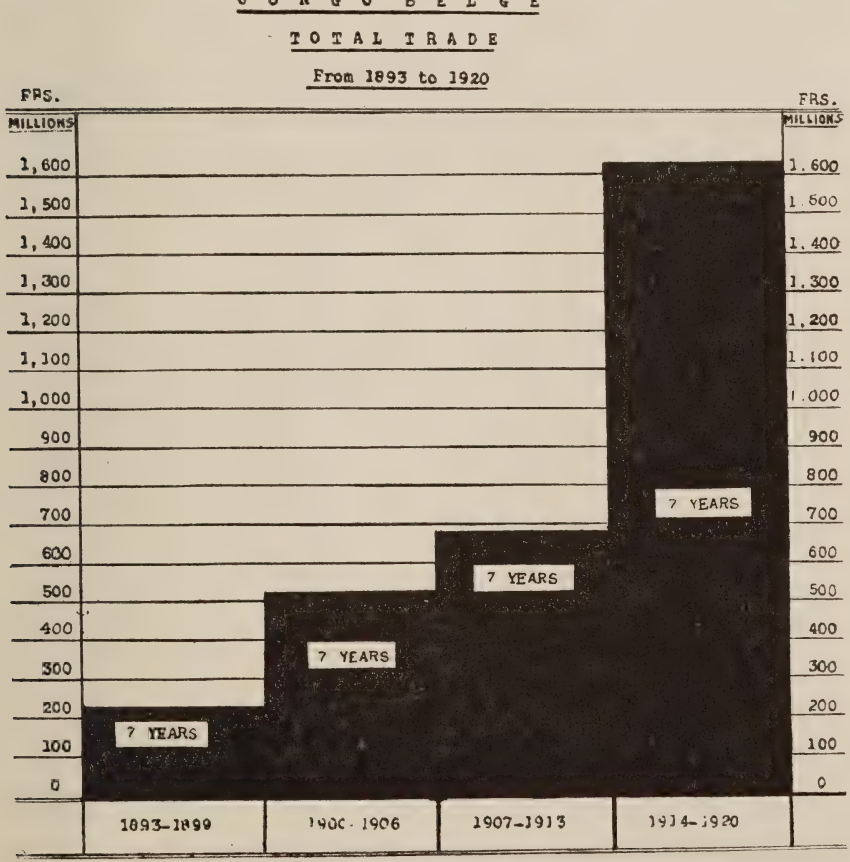
The *Decrease of Liquor Importations* in the seven years ending 1920, *against* the seven years ending 1913, registered 26,704,769 gallons.

In this period *Trade* had registered an *Increase* of £126,953,690 sterling, and *Revenue* £17,482,860 sterling.

In other words, *Trade* under the period of liquor restriction registered an *Increase* of 86 per cent., and the *Revenue* an *Increase* of 61¼ per cent.

Congo Belge.

In certain British commercial circles it has been stated that Prohibition of liquor to natives in Congo Belge accounts for the extremely low production of exports as compared with that of British West Africa, where free importation of alcohol is allowed. Is the suggestion warranted ? Do the facts bear out such a conclusion ?



After a very careful study of Trade in Congo Belge since the time of its earliest records I unhesitatingly say No !

For the purpose of illustration as showing the development of Trade, I have taken a survey of Trade during the past twenty-eight years, commencing in 1893, this being the first completed year for which reliable data is available.

I have divided the twenty-eight years into four periods of seven years each by way of comparison. These give at a glance the progress made in a territory where the liquor traffic is prohibited to natives.

Whether the trade be judged in standards of value, or production, the record of her development is what might rightly be termed an " achievement." This is the more striking when one recalls the many disadvantages under which she is placed.

Her geographical situation—her lack of seaboard and fewness of ports—difficulties of transport—lack of railways and roads—distances from markets—and other disabilities as compared with British West Africa, have an important bearing on the subject. Added to this must be mentioned the fact that missionary enterprise is comparatively speaking of recent date. Yet with all these disadvantages, see what has been accomplished ! The protection of the Native Races from the liquor traffic has been a boon both to the country and to the native peoples. It but requires that the same protection should now be afforded to the Europeans in that great territory, to get the best results.

Portuguese Angola.

No historian will ever be able to record the devastation caused by the Liquor Traffic in Portuguese Angola.

It has carried a blight into every sphere of activity ; it has raised innumerable problems with which the authorities were ill able to deal. Again and again restrictions had been imposed, and far-reaching measures of reform had been introduced ; but each time it has been found that the forces from within as well as without were such as to make the measures largely non-effective. This fact had not been sufficiently realised, in consequence of which her position has been much misunderstood.

It may be well here to state that in the efforts that were made to get the various Powers in Africa to agree to a uniform policy relative to this traffic, during the time of the Peace Conference in Paris, Portugal was the first to declare herself ready and willing to associate herself with the other Powers interested in Africa, for the *total prohibition of alcoholic liquors in Africa*, and the apparatus intended for their manufacture ; further, that *prohibition of alcoholic drinks should apply to all sections of the population.*

This, unfortunately, was not accepted ; nevertheless the determination of Portuguese Angola to root out this indefensible traffic had not deterred her from taking action.

It may be well to note in passing that on October 5th, 1910, the manufacture and distillation of alcohol was prohibited. Liquor for Europeans could, however, be imported, but only in bottles. Liquor freely got to the natives, and instead of them spending their money on the necessaries of life, they spent it on drink.

On May 27th, 1911, the complete prohibition of the use of intoxicating liquor by the natives was enacted. A new decree was issued in April, 1922, increasing the duties on imported spirits, but this had little effect, the natives somehow still got the liquor. Hence it was found that nothing outside the *entire prohibition of spirits could meet the case.* In July, 1922, a decree was issued by which it was sought entirely to abolish this traffic within her territory.

By this decree (a) the sale of alcohol of any kind whatever to the native is prohibited ; (*b*) in six months time the prohibition to extend to the Europeans* and to all the inhabitants of the colony ; (*c*) the importation of intoxicating liquors, national or foreign, and of distilled or fermented liquors containing essences or chemical products recognised as noxious, such as ethers or absinthe, is prohibited.

Angola has five neighbouring states that adjoin her land frontiers in all of which liquor may be imported for Europeans. A glance at her geographical situation with its more or less undefined land boundaries will reveal the problem that is still before her. In addition she has an extended seaboard to guard.

[*As this paper goes through the press we learn that in consequence of the practices in the adjoining territories, the restrictions relative to Europeans, referred to above, have been withdrawn.]

Liberia.

The Liquor Traffic has written its history deep in this territory. It has taken an enormous toll in human life in this negro Republic. What Liberia might have been had her population been protected from the evils of this traffic can hardly be imagined.

In an investigation in this territory I was unable to secure such reliable data as to illustrate by statistics the position of Liberia in relation to this great question, but I will leave the President to give a picture of the situation. President King in his inaugural address on July 5th, 1920, stated : "The Liquor Traffic in Liberia is sapping the life-blood of the State and scattering bloodshed, cruelty and death. Our strong and virile native population is fast deteriorating both morally and physically under the influence of the liquor traffic. The same effects can be seen upon the civilised population of the country, only with larger and more far-reaching results."

The Government, he stated, must by all possible methods discourage the importation of liquor and its manufacture in any shape within the Republic. He pleaded for assistance to enable Liberia to protect her territory. In the work of the redemption of Africa from the curse of the liquor traffic, co-operation from the other

European Powers would be expected. The geographical situation of Liberia is such that it is almost impossible for her to protect her territory without the help of the adjoining Powers. Shall Liberia plead in vain ?

This brings us face to face with the larger issue—the urgent need for united action on the part of the Powers to Prohibit the Liquor Traffic in Africa :

(1) In the interests of the various races themselves ;

(2) In the interests of Trade ;

(3) In the interests of Civilisation.

Africa is being opened up at an amazingly rapid pace. The Cape to Cairo railway will soon be a *fait accompli.* The Western and the Eastern railways are forging their way into the interior. By river, motor, and other methods of transport, distant villages are being brought into touch with the centres, and European contact with the Native is being established. Thousands of native roads are being made as feeders to the main roads. Communication between North and South, East and West, will soon be linked up. What will this mean to the Continent ? That millions will be brought into contact with Western civilisation and what it has to offer.

The first commercial importations into Africa on a large scale were rifles and gin. Is this to be repeated in the Africa we are now opening up with such feverish haste ? Sir Frederick Lugard, in his book *The Dual Mandates,* says in reference to the Liquor Traffic and the Native Races :

> " From the commercial point of view the spirit traffic was a disastrous policy. . . . It is a traffic which not only usurps the place of more legitimate trade, but kills it."

That was the considered judgment of one of the most experienced administrators in native affairs. But the matter goes further, the spirit traffic not merely kills legitimate trade, it eventually ends by *killing the native producer and consumer.*

Is the future of Africa to be mortgaged for the sake of a " gin " traffic ?

Africa has been asleep for centuries, so say some, but my knowledge of Africa does not bring me quite to endorse this statement. From its early records it is plainly evident that the African people never had time to sleep. Whatever opinions one may hold as to the statement with respect to Africa sleeping, one thing is certain, and that is she is now thinking, and the next stage is—" Africa—What ? " This is the momentous stage, one fraught with infinite possibilities for good or ill. In the consciousness that there is a place for her not merely in the economics of the world but in the general and providential order of things, a new vista has been opened up and forces have been realised which in a short time will assume vast proportions.

The bottling up of the energies of the Native Races, held so long in subjection by the hard grip of the slave traffic and the liquor traffic, cannot any longer under whatever name or system be permitted. This great reservoir of native energy can either be used as streams of living water going out in blessing to every part of the Continent, or it can become the flood that shall sweep away the last vestige of civilisation. What can be done to make possible the former and to avoid the latter ? It is a question that will not brook delay.

To those nations upon whom has been laid the duty of protecting the Native Races from the evils of the Liquor Traffic there rests a great responsibility. Each race has its particular contribution to make to the health, wealth, and comfort of the great whole. The failure to protect these races will bring its own nemesis. Territory does not count for everything ; moral forces are the deciding factors in the final analysis, and it is these we must call into requisition. A world's pressure of moral forces must be brought to bear upon the Governments concerned that shall break for ever this indefensible traffic with the Native Races, which has brought such evil in its train.

The need of the present is for a vision, a vision whose range is not limited by artificial boundaries, territorial divisions, or even of nationality, but one that reaches out to the wider interests of humanity that are bound by a common tie of mutual service, of sorrow and joy, alike akin to all.

We are standing in the place of great opportunity.

YESTERDAY our supreme duty was to save the primitive native, and, whilst that is still necessary, TO-DAY our urgent duty is to save those whom we have more or less educated, who, striving to follow the example of by far too large a section of Europeans, fall an easy prey to the Liquor Traffic and are now to be found among the drinking section of the community.

WHAT THE TO-MORROW FOR AFRICA SHALL BE, who can say, if we fail in this critical hour, and what shall be the answer of a Christian civilisation to the challenge contained in the following poem, written by an African ? :

" How would you have us ? As we are ?
Or sinking 'neath the load we bear ?
Our eyes fixed forward on a star ?
Or gazing empty at despair ?

" Rising or falling ? Men or things ?
With dragging pace or footsteps fleet ?
Strong willing sinews in your wings ?
Or tightening chains about your feet ? "

HOW WOULD YOU HAVE US ?

NATIVE RACES AND THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC UNITED COMMITTEE
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